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ORGANIZING CHILD-STUDY WORK IN A SMALL CITY

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Much of the present interest in child-study is directly due to atypical children. The blindest of us have been forced to see that old-time methods in school did not fit the case of the incorrigible and the imbecile, the deaf mute, the blind, the crippled. All over this country the so-called "special" work for children is starting. This paper aims to show what one small city can accomplish in this line.

Oakland, California, has approximately 20,000 school children, distributed in 27 full eight-grade schools and 13 primary schools, and covering a wide extent of territory. The city is shaped roughly like a long elbow, with the convex side turned toward San Francisco Bay, the concave to the hills and with the center of town at the elbow itself. On the edges of the commercial center and along the water front live the very poor, a large majority of whom are southern Europe immigrants. There is a large oriental population also in this part of town. Except in a few limited districts near the hills there are settlements of all manner of foreigners who came over the bay after the San Francisco fire and stayed. Only three large schools in the city have what may be called a *good* class of children, and many of the others are full to the doors of Italians, Spanish, Portuguese, etc., with a social history which includes for many generations back no adequate schooling.

These were the conditions met by the psychologist who began work in Oakland just a year ago. Superintendent McClymonds before her coming had sent notes to the school principals asking them to consult with their teachers and send in lists of children in their respective schools whom they considered subnormal. The directing psychologist began at once examining these children, so that the first training-room might be opened as soon as possible. Three weeks after the work was begun, the training-room was

opened. The dozen children for the class were selected from the first thirty-three examined.

The first mistake often made in serious attempts at special work is to omit expert study of cases before opening a training-room. Take a case in point. In a certain school system observed by the writer a special room was opened. An assistant superintendent placed twenty children in this room. He knew nothing of the children, except that they were reported to him as "off." Four inexperienced or partly experienced teachers tried and failed in the room in rapid succession. The wail arose, "Why is our special room a failure?" The answer to this question is perfectly clear. None of the teachers knew anything about their pupils' mental makeup. There was no psychological diagnosis to fall back on. The inexperienced teacher is as likely to make mistakes as a young interne doctoring a boy for measles who has a broken leg. Furthermore, the teachers put in charge of this special room knew nothing of the pupils' homes, parentage, habits, or physical condition. A clinical examination would have told them all these things. Finally there were twenty children in the room—nearly twice too many. Of these twenty nearly one-half were marked defectives of so serious a type that they should have been institutional cases, a few were bright truants, and a few were the ordinary subnormals for whom these classes are established. Of the conditions of room, yard, work materials, etc., I have not space to tell. They were impossibly bad.

This example is cited to illustrate the need of a well-organized clinic or child-study department before the work of class instruction actually begins. The clinic should have at its service a well-trained psychological diagnostician acquainted with the character and needs of children. The experiment in Oakland is characterized by the organization of a clinic as its first step in the undertaking.

The one classroom opened last February in Oakland has been a success from the beginning, though open only three days a week. Three seemingly hopeless cases, children who had remained in first grade from three to six years, returned months ago to advanced grades in their own schools and are carrying the work. With one exception the children who have remained in the training-room

have advanced steadily—in a few cases, rapidly. One could write a volume on the methods used to bring about these happy results, but it is of more importance here to describe other phases of this work in Oakland.

The psychologist in charge of this work has given two days a week to work in the office and to school visiting. Thursday is open clinic day. Children come in from all over Oakland and even from near-by towns and remoter places in the state. Some are children who have never been in school, the nervous, imbecile, etc. After a thorough psychological examination of the child has been made the parents are advised as to the proper course to pursue. Should the child be under the care of a private teacher, the teacher often comes to get help in mapping out studies fitted to a weak mind. If the child is imbecile and the parents can be persuaded, application blanks for the state institution at Eldridge are filled out and the directing psychologist may even go into court to testify if necessary. If the imbecile child is in school, it becomes necessary to show the parents that the child cannot continue to attend ordinary school.

If the subnormal child continues in the regular school classes the work of the child-study department is chiefly advisory. The Department of Medical Inspection deals with the child's physical disabilities. The psychologist describes carefully to the parents any mental helps which they can use with the child at home, and also urges upon them right living for the child in every way. A report is sent to the grade teacher, telling the conditions found, all that has been done or advised, and adding any suggestions which it may be possible for her to carry out in her full school-room.

The cost of properly equipped special work for subnormal children includes three kinds of items. The first two are general and will need no duplication. The third belongs to the special room.

I. Salary of the psycho-clinical officers.

II. Fitting out an office:

a) Apparatus for clinical use	\$115
b) Printed matter for office use	70
c) Office furnishings	100

III. Cost of one training-room, to be added to as finances permit:

a) Teacher's salary	\$1,200
b) Materials for training-room—initial expense (including piano at \$200)	300
c) Materials for training-room—succeeding years	40

The last item in a room for the blind would be considerably increased because of necessary Braille books, machines, etc.; and all subnormal or truant rooms in schools unequipped with manual-training and domestic-science facilities would be far more costly.

The number of rooms ultimately needed will depend on the size of the school system. In Oakland the subnormals approximate closely the 2 per cent to 4 per cent published by other investigators. So far 325 children have been examined. Of these 12 per cent are institutional cases, 4 per cent incorrigible, and 12 per cent so high grade that the ordinary ungraded class can care for them. A close calculation indicates that we shall have at least 550 in all when the schools have reported fully, or about 400 subnormals alone. Dropping one-eighth of these and calling the number 350, we find that it will take 25 rooms of 14 scholars each to accommodate them. It will take \$35,000 each year to cover the salaries of psychologist and teachers, and office and room maintenance on this basis.

The school board to whom these figures look large should look at the other side of the budget of expense. Principals and teachers unite in crying for relief from the burden of the atypical. They are the absent, the tardy, the ill-behaved, as well as the stupid. If statements are to be believed, this class of children takes at least 10 per cent of the teachers' time. I have heard the percentage put as high as 90 per cent, but am keeping to the minimum. Now if each teacher devotes one-tenth of her time or one-half an hour a day to these cases especially, she is giving at least 50 cents worth of her time each day. A corps of 400 teachers in a year of 40 weeks will devote \$40,000 worth of time. Accounts seem to balance, without taking into consideration the principal's time saved, the better condition in general classes both for pupils and teachers, and the far better results with the subnormals themselves.

A saving of expense can be made in a school system which can correlate its work with a near-by normal school or college. The

work in towns and cities has already gone far, far ahead of the supply of specially trained teachers. The demand for teachers in institutions for feeble minded is also far beyond the supply. Some day our training schools and colleges will wake up to the demand, but the day is discouragingly slow in coming, and at present the hardest problem in initiating a child-study department is in finding the psycho-clinician, and then experienced or trained teachers. It is hoped that this paper may have some influence in opening up this training. If the heads of our normal schools and colleges were more interested in what might be called economic psychology, they would see the need and value of such courses more clearly. They should realize that some who have done good work in general child psychology served their apprenticeship with defective children. The processes of a feeble and erratic mind can be analyzed as those of the more normal and complicated one cannot. One can learn much from these abnormal processes from the idiot who can just barely fixate on an object, past the prehensile stage, through memory, on up to the moron who shows all kinds of brain activity, but all feeble. Every teacher who enters a schoolroom would gain much by studying these subnormal minds, not only to help her to deal with the abnormals she meets in her work, but because of her vastly increased understanding of the mental processes of her normal children.

School men are beginning to realize that from the training-rooms of the atypical come many of the methods which fit the average child. The incorrigible and the imbecile have been the first to be granted the privileges of digging and hammering, of sewing and cooking, of doing things vocational. Because we have been forced to learn what to do with the abnormal, we are learning good educational methods for the normal. The sooner we learn to use wisely psychological information gained from abnormals the better it will be, not only for the weak ones, but for the normal as well.